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# THE LIBRARY EXTENSION MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN CITIES

BY ARTHUR E. BOSTWICK, PH.D.,

Librarian St. Louis Public Library.

Library extension work may be carried on in either of two ways: by establishing new libraries or by extending the scope of already existing institutions. In cities the tendency now is to lessen, rather than to increase, the number of working institutions, to consolidate individual libraries and to operate all extension work from a central point, through branch libraries, deposits, or delivery stations.

Increase of a library's scope may be extensive or intensive—it may operate by pushing out into unoccupied territory, or it may endeavor to carry the library's work and influence into new fields in territory already occupied. Increase by establishing new branches or deposit stations is usually of the former type. Work of the library with children, with schools or with local clubs is of the latter type.

To illustrate, we may consider a public library of the type common fifty years ago, typified by the Astor Library in New York, supported generally by endowment and limiting its use purely to reference. Its influence, of a quality and value not to be minimized, extended territorially throughout adjacent parts of the city and beyond this in isolated spots, sometimes to a great distance. It was confined very largely to adult students and scholars, more and more so as it extended to a distance. If we compare the quality and extent of this influence with that of the present New York Public Library, we see that in the first place the sphere has been pushed out territorially on all sides and in the second that it reaches many more classes and many more individuals in the community. The territorial extension has been effected by establishing branch libraries, in some cases by consolidation with already existing smaller libraries, by placing deposits of books in educational, commercial and industrial institutions in regions not yet thickly enough settled to support a branch; sometimes also by home libraries placed in isolated families. The intensive increase has been first of all by

lending books out for home use instead of confining all reading to the library, at once trebling or quadrupling the number read by adults in any given region; second, by making special provision for children, thus doubling again the use over any given territory; and third by the employment of some of the devices noted above as effective in territorial extension, namely, coöperation with all sorts of community organizations—social, religious, industrial, educational and so on. The discovery of these subsidiary agencies, getting into relations of friendship and confidence with them, and applying these relationships to the matter in hand, namely, the extension of good reading, has occupied very much of the time and energy of city librarians of late.

The whole extension work, it should be noted, is dependent on a changed conception of the purposes of a collection of books as found in a library, and of the duties of librarians. The modern librarian is a sort of book missionary; he conceives it to be his duty, not only to gather and conserve a collection of books, but to promote the proper use of these books throughout the community. He is anxious that none of his books should remain unused and that no citizen within his jurisdiction should fail to read. The quality and quantity of library extension as above noted are calculated to bring about this result.

Some of the more important agencies of extension will now be taken up and discussed singly.

#### CIRCULATION

The lending of books for home use is now one of the public library's most important functions. In most libraries the number of books available for lending is a large proportion of the whole; and in many there is theoretically no obstacle to the lending of any part of the stock, though it may be necessary to retain a considerable number for reference purposes. The allowed number withdrawn at once has steadily increased of late, until in most libraries there is little restriction in this regard. The old idea that reference use is always serious and home-use relatively trivial is fast disappearing. The open-shelf system, which makes the shelves free to the user, is now universal in branch libraries and is gaining ground in the large main libraries of cities. This in itself has been an important intensive agency.

## CHILDREN'S WORK

This began by an attempt to establish libraries for children alone, but it is now carried on usually in separate rooms, wherever there is an adult collection. In a branch system, the children's rooms are often placed under a superintendent or supervisor so that the whole children's work of the library is carried on consistently by one department. Careful book selection, personal guidance of reading, and often the stimulation of interest by such devices as the telling of stories, are functions of such a department.

## BRANCHES

Branches are often established simply on the demand of a community, but that demand has often previously been tested by some of the other agencies of extension, such as deposits, traveling libraries or delivery stations. Owing to large donations, it has sometimes been possible for cities to lay out a considerable branch system all at once. In such case, considerations of population and area and also the existence of old community centers have governed the locations chosen. A branch is a complete library in itself, having its own building, staff and permanent stock of books.

## DEPOSITS

A deposit is a collection of books, generally for circulation, to be changed at intervals. Small deposits are often called traveling libraries. Such collections are sent to schools, churches, clubs, industrial and commercial houses or to any place where they will be properly cared for and used. Very small deposits sent to a private house to be used by a local group of children under the care of a neighborhood worker are called "home libraries." Some deposits are intended to be used only by the employes of the business house, the pupils of the school or the members of the club to which they are sent; others are for the use of the public in the neighborhood.

The small deposits known as traveling libraries are of two types: fixed and fluid. The former prevailed at first, each "library" consisting of a fixed collection of books which circulated as a unit. The tendency now is to allow much freedom of selection on the part of the beneficiary, so that the collection is made to order, instead of ready made, as formerly. The made to order traveling libraries

are called in many places "open-shelf" libraries—an unfortunate term, the word being already widely used to indicate free access to library shelves—quite a different thing.

#### DELIVERY STATIONS

These are places, usually in drug stores, where books are sent on the order of individual card-holders. There may be a deposit of books at such a station, or a true branch may include both deposit and delivery features. Delivery stations are now regarded only as necessary substitutes, in certain cases, for deposit stations or branch libraries. They offer the user practically no opportunity for selection, but they do give this opportunity to the library authorities themselves, which is not a bad thing. The book ordered at a station is often not immediately available and another is substituted for it. This gives the librarian an opportunity to control reading that may be productive of good when advantage is taken of it with tact.

#### WORK WITH SCHOOLS

This includes not only the use of the school for a branch, or a deposit station, but also efforts to assist teachers by furnishing them with professional literature and offering books for class-room reading, and efforts to see that pupils make use of their neighborhood libraries. Classes are often instructed in the proper way to use libraries, either in the libraries themselves, or at school.

#### CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS

If these have club houses or club rooms, they are given deposit collections. If not the assembly or club rooms now included in most library buildings may be placed at their disposal free of charge.

This tends to promote good feeling, to make the club look upon the library as its home and to create a little community center whose focus is a collection of good books.

#### FOREIGNERS

With this same end in view, libraries are adding to their stock books in the home languages of newly arrived immigrants, especially in branch libraries surrounded by them. Large city libraries may thus possess small collections of the literatures of thirty or forty

different tongues and may have a considerable circulation in each. This course promotes Americanization instead of delaying it as some persons once feared it would do.

#### MEN AS READERS

The users of the older libraries were almost entirely men. The first impulse of library extension was to take in women and children also as readers. Over-emphasis of this movement had as its results a relative decrease of male users and the growing danger that public libraries might come to be looked upon in the community as largely intended for women and children. Recent efforts to restore the balance have been in the direction of providing literature of all kinds specially adapted to male adult readers, particularly informative works in the various trades and industries and in the different departments of business activity, such as advertising and salesmanship; the creation of separate departments like the applied science or technology rooms in most large city libraries, and the provision of large collections of purely business reference material, such as city directories, maps, trade catalogues and so on. Municipal reference libraries, modeled on the successful legislative reference libraries in state capitals, have been opened in city halls. Altogether the extension movement seems to have regained the balance that it was once in danger of losing.

#### PUBLICITY

One of the most effective agents of library extension is well-considered publicity. Library boards have usually objected to paid advertising, yet even that is now being employed in many cities, especially on particular occasions. Publicity is directed toward informing all citizens of the library's existence, location, resources and aims, of the fact that it is tax-supported and free to all, and of the educational and recreational advantages of using it. These facts may be communicated to the public by printed matter on placards or attached to bulletins, lists, book-marks and other regular publications of the library; or they may be given orally, in talks or addresses before clubs, associations or schools at stated or special gatherings.

Special days or periods are often appointed to bring the claims of the library clearly before the public, such as the Visitors' Nights held periodically at the St. Louis Public Library, or the Library

Week held recently in Toledo, Ohio. These may have as their object increased financial support of the library, the object being to affect legislation or municipal appropriation. More generally, however, the aim is simply to bring about increased use of the library's facilities by making the public more familiar with what it offers.

### KEEPING TRACK OF READERS

The net increase of active readers in a library, despite all these extension activities, is lessened everywhere by the fact that new registrations are offset by the disuse of the library by former readers. In connection with extension work some way of ascertaining what becomes of these backsliders must ultimately be adopted by libraries. The prevention of a loss is evidently as effective as the addition of a new reader. So far, this work has been neglected. "Follow-up" experiments have been tried, both by using the mails and by personal visitation, but the results, so far, are not encouraging. Libraries have no uniform method of defining "active" or "live" users; nor can they ascertain, in general, the number included in the class, further than to know the number of holders of unexpired cards. The expiration limit is not always the same, and the "live" holder may have used his card only once within that limit. On the other hand, a really frequent user may have neglected, for the moment, to renew his expired card. Possibly a first step toward solving this problem may be the division of card-holders into groups, based on frequency of use or other ascertainable characteristics.

### BOOK SELECTION

The extension of library use is evidently closely connected with the provision of books that will attract new readers and hold the old ones. The library tries to regard, in selection, both the needs and the demands of its community. The two factors may not closely correspond, and there is danger in neglecting either. Purchase based on need alone, before that need is fully realized, may repel instead of attract readers; while too ready compliance with an unworthy demand may be fatal to the library's educative influence. Adjustment must continually be made, and the librarian must also be sure that what comes to him as a demand is really the wish of the community and not merely the voice of a few who have learned to press their desires with vigor.

The general participation of a community in book-selection is rare and usually the result of stimulation. Too large an amount of current library book-buying is done in the dark. Librarians welcome suggestions from readers, and are pleased when they are made, even if immediate compliance is impossible for financial or other reasons.

### BUILDINGS

The prevalence of extension work has vitally affected the form and functions of the large city library building. Fifty years ago there was little more to the internal economy of a large library than storage space for books and room in which to read them. These needs were often satisfied together by placing the books on wall-shelves, or in alcoves around the reading room. The modern building needs also assembly and club-rooms for meetings, exhibition rooms, a special collection, with its reception room, for teachers, a clearing-house for branch and station deliveries and offices for the heads of the various new departments necessitated by the change in policy. The staff is greatly increased, and its personnel must be carefully scrutinized regarding both education and personal qualities. Often the library includes a school or class for training librarians; and all sorts of arrangements for the personal comfort of the staff have become common—locker rooms, lunch rooms, rooms for rest and for recreation, and so on. Part of the building, often the most attractive part, is set aside for the children, and the work connected with home-use—open shelves, registration, reserves, overdues and all the related machinery—takes up a vast deal of room which must be provided in the precise spot where it is needed. It so comes about that the new is related to the old building somewhat as the modern department store is related to a quiet old shop dealing in goods of only one kind. Branch libraries also must be provided with space for these same activities, excepting only those that depend on the function of the main library building as a headquarters.

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